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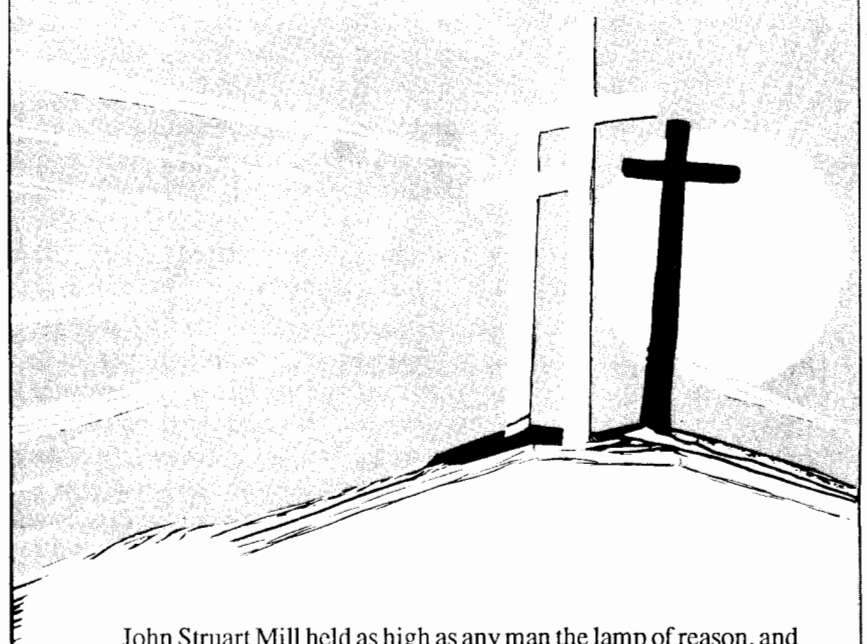

John Struart Mill held as high as any man the lamp of reason, and it burned the more brightly because he lived. Whatever he touched, he did not fail to clarify.--*Harold Laski*

In This Issue:

John Stuart Mill: Lamp of Reason
What Paul's Visit to Heaven Means to Us

Volume 32, No. 1 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **January, 1990**

The Hope of the Believer...No. 11

WHAT PAUL'S VISIT TO HEAVEN MEANS TO US

He was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. — 2 Cor. 12:4

Paul's description of his ascent into Paradise is both one of the most baffling and one of the most exciting parts of the New Testament. It is baffling because it is so foreign to human experience, either in or outside the Bible. How can we come anywhere near comprehending an account that takes a man to heaven and back? It is exciting because it relates facts that have to do with our own destiny. If we may conclude that we are to have experiences that will approximate what Paul only obliquely refers to in this text, then our hope is made all the more certain.

While Paul in this text recounts the most glorious experience of his life, it is one he might never have told. It was his "ace card' that he held in reserve to use against his enemies who questioned the integrity of his apostleship. Had they not pressed their case against him, even suggesting that their own "visions and revelations" were more impressive than Paul's, he might never have played his ace. The loss would have been ours, for this bit of Scripture is pregnant with living hope.

It is full of hope for us because Paul is not simply recounting a dream or a vision but an actual experience. He tells of being caught up to the third heaven, to the Paradise of God itself, where he had such an experience that he could only refer to it as indescribable. If we believe this was a real historical event, that the apostle actually left earth and went to heaven and then back again, then we have grounds for an ebullient hope. If we believe Paul's story, then we believe there is a real Paradise of God, and that if he went there while yet present in this world he certainly went there after death. And we can believe that while we may not have Paul's first experience we will certainly have his second. If Paul went to heaven and returned, we will go to heaven and stay!

We can only guess as to why Paul would be the only person in human history — insofar as we know — to go to heaven and return to this earth to finish out his life in this world. For some reason he had a need for such an experience, especially for the revelation he received while in Paradise, perhaps because of the sufferings he had to endure. He said he "heard inexpressible words," which must have been

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some kind of revelation. He begins the narrative by identifying it as "revelations of the Lord," and yet he says the words were unutterable or ineffable. But perhaps not absolutely, for he also says it was unlawful for him to tell what he heard. So what he heard must have been intelligible to him, constituting some kind of message, and yet of such a nature as to be unutterable. It would be something like saying, "What I heard was so glorious that it defied expression." But still Paul understood it, and it must have wonderfully encouraged him, and it may well have made possible the remainder of his earthly ministry. While what he heard and understood was "too wonderful for words," it was not lawful for him to reveal — even if he could put it into words, which he says he couldn't!

That Paul refers to "a man in Christ" who had this experience shows how objective he was trying to be, as if to stand at a distance and look at it impersonally. But we know he was referring to himself and not someone else since he switches to first person as he continues to tell the story.

That he gives the time — "fourteen years ago" — shows that it was as real as anything else in Paul's life that could be dated. And it shows how long he had waited to tell about it. He might never have revealed it had it not proved vital in dealing with his opponents in Corinth. But the time element is of no help in determining exactly where Paul was on earth when he was "caught up" to the third heaven, and it does not matter. The "caught up" is the same as in 1 Thess. 4:17 where the saints are raptured to meet Christ in the air at his second coming. It seems certain that the apostle's rapture into Paradise was involuntary and not self-induced by some kind of rigid mystical discipline. It was an act of God, and was probably sudden and unexpected on Paul's part. This is a lesson within itself, for if God wants us to have some mind-boggling experience he has sufficient resources to bring it about on his own. We don't have to send up fire and smoke and incantations, or even shouts of glory, to get God to do what it is his will to do. We should keep ourselves open for his surprises, and this was surely a big surprise for the apostle.

It is remarkable that Paul did not know whether he was in his body or out of his body when he was raptured, which means it may have been either. While it was a "spiritual" experience, it might nonetheless have been corporeal. Did not our Lord ascend into heaven after his resurrection in his body? One could also surmise that both Enoch and Elijah, and perhaps Moses, were caught up to God in the body. To Paul his ascent to Paradise was as real as any experience he had on earth, for it may have been no different than any other experience in the body, only far more glorious. And yet he may have been disembodied or non-corporeal, a strictly "spiritual" experience. It is amazing that he could not tell the difference, which may suggest that there is no difference insofar as our awareness is concerned. The reality that this detail suggests is breathtaking. Even if we are but "souls" in heaven (which I am confident is not the case) it will be just as real as our bodily experiences here on earth.

While some scholars have concerned themselves with whether Paul is referring to two experiences (one when he was caught up to the third heaven and the other when he was caught up to Paradise) or but one, it is generally agreed that he is revealing a single experience. But there is ground for concluding that he is referring to two stages in that experience — that he was raptured first to the third heaven and then on to Paradise. But it is more likely that while the third heaven and Paradise might not be synonyms, Paradise is placed within the third heaven. Paul says he was caught up *to* the third heaven and *into* Paradise. We cannot know for sure how these two relate, but what matters is that Paul went to the third heaven, whatever that is, and even into Paradise itself, which we know to be the abode of the blessed dead and the dwelling place of God himself.

Paradise is heaven. Jesus thought of it as such when he said to the penitent thief in Lk. 23:43, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." How comforting it is to all of us who believe that our Lord spoke of going to Paradise with such assurance, and of taking the (former) thief with him. He did not have to say, "Maybe I can put in a good word for you" or "I hope I may be able to help you." Jesus knew without any doubt that he would be in Paradise once the ordeal of the Cross was over — and that the penitent thief would be with him. We can be equally confident that Paradise is for real and that Jesus will see to it that we go there when we leave this world. How glorious it is to be a believer!

Paradise is also equated with heaven in Rev. 2:7: "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." This verse supports the tradition, long a part of both Jewish and Christian theology, that the tree of life that was once in the Garden of Eden is now in the Paradise of (the third?) heaven. There are numerous references to Paradise, which means a walled garden, in various non-Biblical Jewish and Christian texts, which, while interesting, add little to what we already have in the Bible. One source, for example, the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus,* mentions Enoch, Elijah, and the penitent thief as being in Paradise, and they are joined by Adam and all the saints.

While we cannot be certain what Paul meant by the third heaven, it is probable that he thought of the first heaven as the clouds and the earth's atmosphere, the second heaven as the stars and all the celestial bodies, and the third heaven as spiritual, as the nonspatial and nontemporal home of God. In both Old and New Testaments heaven appears in the plural. The Scriptures speak of "heavens" and "the heaven of heavens," and Jesus is referred to as having passed through the heavens and having been made higher than the heavens. In non-Biblical Jewish sources there are numerous references to there being seven heavens, but it is unlikely Paul had any such idea, for he would not have referred to the third heaven the way he did had he believed there were four more. It is enough for us to say what appears apparent in our text, that Paul associated the third heaven with Paradise and the throne of God.

We might have expected Paul to tell us what he saw in heaven, but it is only what he heard. Perhaps he saw things too, but it is the unutterable things that he heard that accounts for his secret revelation, perhaps from God himself or from Christ upon his glorious throne. We may be curious about what Paul heard, but it is fruitless to speculate. I am more overwhelmed by the account than I am curious. I am awed by its mystery and feel a reverence for its significance, and my hope is buoyed up by its implications. We do not need to know what Paul heard in heaven. If God had wanted us to know he would have revealed it to the whole church. It was for Paul and Paul alone, and God had his reasons. I venture, however, that what Paul once heard in heaven we also will one day hear or see in all its glory.

It may be that Paul's ascent to heaven into the very presence of God and Christ undergirded much of what he said about the believer's ultimate victory. The apostle spoke with no uncertain authority of Christ's descent from heaven to claim his own, of the resurrection of the dead, and of the rapture of the redeemed into heavenly glory. He spoke of Christians receiving a glorious body like unto Christ's heavenly body. He wrote with assurance that it is better to die and be with Christ, and that when the believer is absent from the body he is at home with the Lord. And as his earthly sojourn ended he could write of "the crown of righteousness" that was laid up in heaven, not only for him but for all who love the Lord.

Who can better speak of heavenly hope than someone who has been there? And who can have a more joyous hope than those of us who believe Paul's testimony of his ascent into heaven where he heard unutterable things?

Paul's ascent was so glorious and so out-of-this-world that God allowed Satan to buffet him with a thorn in the flesh, "lest I should be exalted overmuch by the abundance of the revelation," as the apostle put it in 2 Cor. 12:7. The thorn became so painful that Paul prayed again and again that it would be taken from him. That is when God said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

So the ecstasy of Paradise and things unutterable was balanced by the agony of a thorn in the flesh. The thorn, as painful as it was, thus became the symbol of his hope and of ours. — *the Editor*

Do we realize that as Christians we have within us the self-same Holy Spirit that was in the Son of God while He was on earth? The Father gives the Spirit and it is the same Spirit that was in the Son that is given to us. The Spirit that enabled Him will enable us.--*Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. — Eph. 4:3

The average Christian feels helpless in the face of all the division among believers. Even though he believes in unity he sees no way that he can make any real difference. He may ask, *What can I do?*, but it remains for the most part an unanswered question. I want to give my answer to that question, hoping that it will encourage some people to do what the above text urges upon us, to *endeavor* to do something about disunity among Christians.

It is important for us to realize, first of all, that our problem (to wage war against the evil of a divided church) is not a numbers problem. We do not need great numbers to make a difference. Only a few, even one concerned person, can do much. The breathtaking events going on in Eastern Europe for freedom and democracy were ignited by the labors of a comparatively small number. While tens of thousands have marched and demonstrated for liberty, they were inspired by only a small number. And those thousands are very few in comparison to the hundreds of millions that live in those countries. History teaches us that the great turning events among nations have been launched by a few committed people.

It is not an overstatement to say that God and one impassioned person constitute a majority. Lest we forget that we act from a position of strength when we are right, when we have the truth. There is no truth so obvious as the sinfulness of division among Christians. It is the scandal of Christianity in our day for the followers of Jesus Christ to be so divided that they can't have anything to do with each other. We must really face up to the awful truth that division among Christians is a sin (period!), and that we are wilfully perpetuating a sin when we go on generation after generation doing nothing about it.

When people are smitten by such truths they sometimes ask what they can do. I am going to tell you what you can do. And that is another important truth, a liberating one, that there are some things that we can all do about division among the followers of Christ, and they are things that will make a difference.

1. *You can pray for unity like our Lord did.*

If we are not even praying about this matter there is no point in doing anything else. It is remarkable that Jesus prayed for the unity of all who would believe on him even as he faced the Cross. In that high priestly prayer, as it is called, in John 17 he prays for unity three times, and in one petition he referred to a staggering truth: He prayed that we would all be one "that the world may believe that You sent Me" (Jn. 17:21). Is he not saying that a divided church can never win a lost world? How can we justify any concern for evangelism when we neglect the mandate for unity that the Scriptures impose upon us?

It is a cruel irony that we are a people whose heritage is a passion for unity and

yet prayers for unity are seldom heard in our assemblies. Some years ago while visiting Westminster Abbey in London I was impressed by a notice I saw on one of the columns: *Prayers for Christian unity in this chapel each Tuesday at 2 p.m.* It would be rare indeed for such an announcement to be made in one of our congregations. If one judged us by what we pray about, he might conclude that we have no real concern for unity. While some of us might be so narrow as to wonder if God would hear the prayers of Anglicans anyway, it should impress us that they appear to pray for Christian unity more than we do.

But when our Lord prayed for unity he was praying privately, and this we can all do. If there is but one person in a congregation that is praying for the unity of all God's people, you can be that person. If there are only a few people in each church praying for unity it might well change our world. We can believe with Tennyson that "More things are wrought by prayer than the world dreams of," and with Jas. 5:16, "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

2. *You can study and educate yourself on the subject of unity.*

One of our greatest needs is people who are knowledgeable and articulate on this subject. We have been ignorant about unity long enough. Not only are we to learn what the Scriptures teach about unity, but we need to know what is going on at the local, national, and international level. We must become acquainted with ecumenical issues and be aware of the problems involved in unity efforts. We should start by learning what is going on among our own people, and we must come to appreciate our heritage as a unity movement. The best way for us to change our world is to change ourselves. To become sensitive, informed, and involved in reference to one of the world's most weighty problems would make one part of the answer.

3. *You can speak up for unity as opportunities arise.*

Once you are prepared to do something the opportunities will come! God always uses the prepared person. You can share with others your own concern for division among Christians. You can insist in a kind and loving way that something must be done about this scandal. You can expose the fallacy that has long hung like an albatross about our necks, that unity can come only by people seeing everything the way we do. You can invite our people to recover the wisdom of that grand old motto, "In essentials unity, in opinons liberty, in all things love."

4. *You can dare to ask questions.*

You can start by asking the elders and the minister why it is that we never have anything to do with other Christians, not even to share in an Easter or Thanksgiving service or the ministerial association. How can we claim to be a people who believe in unity when we have no fellowship with other Christians? Are we making non-essentials (our own opinions and preferences) tests of fellowship? We must become intolerant of the fact that we are divided umpteen different ways. We must grow sick

and tired of sectarian strife and bigotry. Are we to insist that all believers in our town and all around the world sing acappella before we accept them as Christians and enjoy fellowship with them? Must they wear the name we have chosen to wear and believe precisely what we believe and do exactly as we do before we will have anything to do with them? Stir up your righteous indignation! We need a thousand angry souls who are disgusted with our sectarian nonsense!

5. *You can be your own unity movement.*

You can be a peacemaker in your own community and in your own church. But not a piecemaker. We have had enough divisions. You can *live* the above Scripture in your heart and soul, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," remembering that it is the Spirit's unity, not our own, that we are to keep. Unity is a gift to be received, and we receive it through forbearing love. If you stand up for unity you will be criticized and even persecuted, for the one thing that a sectarian cannot abide is one who seeks unity through forbearing love. The party spirit demands that we love and receive only those who are like us.

You can reach out to others by visiting other churches, by writing letters, by using the telephone, by an encouraging word. And by enlarging your circle of friends. Try dropping by a parochial school and thanking the principal or a teaching nun for what they are doing for the community. Drop a card to some "denominational" neighbor in the hospital and tell her you are praying for her. Above all, don't allow yourself to buy the old fallacy that if you love and receive people that it means you approve of their lifestyle or endorse all that they believe.

The bottom line is for us to be like our Lord. He was a walking unity movement all his own! The most sinful of humanity saw in him the love of God and they realized that when he accepted them, warts and all with no strings attached, he was not approving of their sins. And that is how we got in, that Jesus accepts sinful people. Right now I know that Jesus loves and accepts me, just as I am. But he doesn't approve of my sinful ways, and day by day he keeps lifting me up higher. He keeps on helping me and believing in me in spite of my foibles. That is what grace means.

That is the way we are to treat others. And that is the way of unity. By God's grace we can do it! — *the Editor*

We should be thankful for any calamity that will humble us. We should remember that clear and elevated views of God and heaven are, after all, more than a compensation for all the sufferings which it may be necessary to endure in order to make us humble.-- *Albert Barnes*

THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! --2 Cor. 9:15

I write as the Christmas season approaches. It is a time that we think of gifts in a special way. If we are ever to learn that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35) it would be at Christmas. But gifts are a joy whether given or received. But how many gifts are there that are indescribable? The most expensive car or the most stunning diamond can be described. It is fitting anytime of the year to ponder the depths of the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ our Lord. Some versions read, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift." Others use unspeakable. It is surely one of the great lines of all Scripture. God has given us a gift that defies all expression. It is indescribable and unspeakable because it is unfathomable.

Among the gifts that thrilled me most was a little red wagon that I received on the Christmas following my sixth birthday. I distinctly recall pushing it about the house on Christmas day and telling my mother that I was thankful to Santa Claus for bringing it. She informed me that my parents had something to do with Santa bringing it, information that might have confused me, but I don't recall that it did. It is interesting that I remember that conversation after all these years. The little wagon was my joy for a long time, and it is associated with the earliest religious experience that I recall. One day in company with older kids I pulled the wagon some distance from home. When a storm suddenly came upon us, we all made it for home. Since I was younger and had my wagon to pull, the others ran off and left me far behind. As I ran and pulled the wagon bounced up and down on the rocky road. Dark clouds loomed overhead and there were flashes of lightning. I was frightened, whether of the storm or of God I know not, but I clearly remember coming to a dead stop, getting on my knees alongside my wagon and praying. I have no idea now what I said then, but it was surely a fervent prayer for a six-year old and an effective one since I got home safely. While that little wagon was a delightful gift, it was hardly an inexpressible one, for I had no problem telling all about it to anyone that would listen.

A gift that was a close second to the wagon was my first suit of clothes, which one of my older brothers gave me a year or so later, but not at Christmas. It had long pants and a vest. It was the vest that intrigued me most. My brother put his own hat on the back of my head, had me stand with my legs parted and my hands on my hips displaying the vest, and had my picture taken with him standing at my side. That picture, afterwards enlarged, yet graces the old albums of the family archives. That brother is now 85 and we are still close. While he gave me one of my most memorable gifts, it was not indescribable.

I have never received an indescribable gift from any human being, nor has anyone else, for we live in a finite world. Everything, even gifts, are within well-

defined boundaries. Gifts, like all the world around us, all pass away. The most elegant gift soon fades and becomes irrelevant and unimportant. The little red wagon and the suit with long pants and a vest are cherished memories, but they have long since vanished and no longer matter. So it is with all the things of this world.

The one indescribable gift comes only from heaven in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is indescribable or inexpressible because Jesus himself is. He defies description and definition because he is the image of the invisible God, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see (1 Tim. 6:16). To the degree that God's glory and likeness can be revealed Jesus Christ reveals them. To the extent that we can comprehend Christ we can comprehend God. The gift of Christ is the gift of God himself. If ever we presume to comprehend to any substantial degree, we are to remember the poetry of Paul: "Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Ro. 11:33)

While the apostle attempts to describe Christ to the Philippians with such language as "He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" and "It pleased the Father that in Him all the fulness should dwell," it is evident that Jesus remains inexplicable. While in 1 Cor. 1:24 Paul writes of "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God," it is clear that he refers to a subject that is beyond all understanding. It is revealed to us that Christ is that Word that was in the beginning with God and that that Word became flesh and dwelt among us as the true light of God, but who can comprehend it?

At our congregation here in Denton we are doing an usual thing for a Church of Christ: Like other denominations we are for four Sundays before Christmas lighting the four candles of Advent (the only Church of Christ I know that does so!). The short ceremony is beautiful, meaningful, and spiritual, and it involves the youth. During our sharing time I suggested that we could also have "the four Scriptures of Advent" for everyone to memorize, and I am giving one for each of the Sundays. The first Advent Sunday I chose 2 Cor. 8:9: "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

The second Sunday I selected the passage we are studying in this piece, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift." Next Lord's day, which is the third Sunday of Advent, I will give them Col. 1:19, "It pleased the Father that in Christ all the fulness should dwell," and on the fourth Sunday it will be Jn. 1:14, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

All of these point to what I am saying in this piece, that God's philanthropy is so magnanimous, his grace so overwhelming, and his mercy so abundant— and all these so wondrously manifested in Jesus Christ — that we are so lost in wonder and praise as to join the apostle in the grand doxology *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

That it is a gift, God's free gift to sinful man, cannot be over emphasized. We cannot be good enough to merit it. We cannot work hard enough to earn it. We cannot be powerful enough to demand it. It is not ours because we are good but we are good because it is ours. The free gift is unconditional. God offers it with no strings attached. We only have to accept it through faith and obedience. While the free gift of grace is unconditional, the appropriation of the gift is conditional.

We don't have to burden ourselves with all the worries, uncertainties, fears, and guilt. We don't have to be scared to live and afraid to die. We don't have to be uncertain of our salvation. We don't have to keep trying to be good enough, faithful enough, obedient enough, going to church enough, praying enough. We don't have to worry that our sins and shortcomings will keep us from going to heaven. We cannot trust in our own goodness or in our own strength. We are saved by God's grace. We must learn to let go of the old I-can-do-it-myself religion and accept God's free gift, the unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ. That is the grace of God. Jesus' self-imposed poverty makes us rich.

And that is the only riches that really matter. All other wealth goes the way of all the world. That is why it is the indescribable, inexpressible, unspeakable gift. And that is why we should thank God for such a gift. And that is why ingratitude, according to Luther at least, is the worst of all sins. —*the Editor*

Heroes and Reformers of History...No. 1

JOHN STUART MILL: LAMP OF REASON

This series of ten installments will be on heroes and reformers representing the whole gamut of history, ancient and modern. They will be people who have either influenced my own thinking or have gained my admiration both for their moral and intellectual courage and for their unique contribution to the church and to society. It will in a way be a list of my own heroes, but each one is chosen because I am persuaded that in introducing these people to you that you will be greatly blessed and will be encouraged not only to make them your own friends too but also to emulate their exemplary walk in life and to be uplifted by their values. There will be no particular order, chronological or otherwise, in their appearance. I am sort of introducing them to you as they come to mind, and what a tremendous person each one is! But it may be that you have barely heard of some of them and a few of them not at all, unsung heroes some of them could be called.

I start with John Stuart Mill because he recently reentered my life when I was discussing freedom with students at Dallas Christian College in a class in philosophy. Mill is a hero in man's long struggle to be free. Had he lived in the 1960's instead of a century earlier (He died in 1873), and in this country instead of England, he would have been called a "freedom rider." His essay *On Liberty* is one of the greatest freedom documents ever written. In it he argues that the greatest good of society as a whole is achieved by allowing each person to exercise his own freedom unrestrained, even if he chooses to harm himself, so long as he does no harm to others. "Over himself, over his own body and mind," he writes, "the individual is sovereign." He insists that even error must have free reign, for error is not to be overcome by force but by clearer thinking.

Mill was a child prodigy and he must have had one of the highest IQ's in history. His early training, which he received from his father, sounds more like a record of medieval torture, compared to today's demands on youth, than the superb education that it was. He learned arithmetic and Greek when only three, and by eight he was reading the great Greek and Latin classics. He delighted in the study of world history, and while yet but a boy he wrote a history of Rome. His father led him into logic, philosophy, and economics. At 12 he began Aristotle. His father, who must have been a superb educator, impressed upon him the importance of making knowledge useful. He was not simply to have a head full of facts and data, but he was to learn to think and to use his education for the good of society. Early on he resolved to be a reformer of the world, a *thinking* reformer.

At 21 Mill suffered a mental breakdown, but through sheer determination and a powerful intellect he soon bounced back and was able to pursue his career. At 25 he married a girl of such "character and ability," as he put it, that she wielded a great influence on his life and helped shape his thought. After a brief study of law he began work with the British East India Co. and eventually had a position equivalent to our undersecretary of state. After serving the British government for 30 years, he retired with the intention of giving full time to writing. But he was put up as a candidate for Parliament. Even though he refused to campaign he was nontheless elected. William Gladstone, Britain's great prime minister at the time, said of Mill: "He had a good sense and practical tact of politics, together with the high independent thought of a recluse. He did us all good."

He did us all good! That came to be Mill's rule in life. He dedicated his great mind to a search for the right ethic for a society, and he became convinced that the utilitarian theory of Jeremy Bentham was the answer, the essence of which was, "The greatest good for the greatest number of people," which was known also as "the greatest happiness principle." While this moral philosophy was widely received at the time, Mill's own father being one of its champions, he became known as "the utilitarian heretic" because he radically modified it. In originating the theory Bentham had identified the greatest good as the greatest pleasure, stressing

quantitative pleasures. Mill was willing to identify good as pleasure, but he stressed *qualitative* pleasure, insisting that spiritual and intellectual pleasures are to be preferred to sensual pleasures. As a Christian he argued that Jesus Christ was the greatest of all utilitarians in that he sought the greatest pleasure (or happiness) for the greatest number of people — moral and spiritual pleasure for all mankind.

While Bentham presented utilitarianism as egoistic and as appealing to self-interest (hedonism it is called), Mill taught that the greatest pleasure might be utterly unselfish and even self-denying. Christ's purpose was to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number, and yet he had to endure shame and pain to accomplish this. But even amidst such suffering our Lord found joy in that he was pleasing his heavenly Father and bringing healing to all mankind. Bentham was right that pleasure or happiness is the point of life, Mill conceded, but it is the nature of the pleasure or happiness that matters. Mill believed that the joy of understanding may be a sad joy, but that those who have tasted it would not exchange it for all the frivolous gaieties and empty hopes of the vulgar.

It is his ideas on freedom, however, that are his most significant contribution, and we do well to listen to him since we continue to live in a world in which freedom is threatened. He held that society has no right whatever to interfere with liberty of action except for self-protection. The individual's own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficent warrant to restrain him. We can try to dissuade the one who has harmful habits but we cannot compel him. Nor can we hinder the one who teaches what we believe to be false and injurious to society, for history proves that we are often wrong when we do so and thus deny mankind of truth, as in the case of Jesus and Socrates, who were murdered by those who believed they were wrong.

To deny liberty to those we believe to be wrong, Mill says, is to claim infallibility for ourselves. Even if we know a position to be false, we should still allow for its free expression, for a person in his search for truth has the right to be wrong and to express it. Besides, there may be some truth in his false position that can be learned from its free expression. Even if a position be wholly false it is still right for it to be expressed, for it is good for others to hear it. Truth has nothing to fear from error, for error causes truth to shine all the brighter. "He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that," Mill insists.

The true truth-seeker will learn from the one who is in error, Mill observes, for one must know the position he rejects if he is to know what he believes. Truth must face up to error, and this should be done by giving a fair hearing to the one who really believes the error and who defends it earnestly. The truth-seeker must be willing to hear error in its most plausible and persuasive form, and he must face the full force of the difficulty that a false position presents. Otherwise he will not possess that portion of truth that meets and disposes of the difficulty. This is why he wants the false position to be presented in its most favorable light. Too, when a pernicious view is allowed freedom of expression it helps the one who holds the error to see

that it is indeed wrong. So long as he is denied freedom the erroneous view will become increasingly important to him.

Mill notes that most educated people are often in the position of arguing fluently and persuasively for a position they believe to be true and yet do not really know that it is true, for they never place themselves in the position of the person who differs with them. They have no idea what one might say who holds a different view. They are blind in one eye in that they see only the side they want to see.

Some say that Mill went too far in allowing for dissenting views, for in times of national emergency it might be necessary to curtail the speech of demagogues whose aim is to stir up unrest. Justice Holmes was right that whenever there is "clear and present danger" in the expression of opinion society has the right to repress it without waiting for it to do overt harm. But Mill was speaking generally, and his ideas of freedom of opinion apply to most all situations in both church and society. It is a sad day for any church when it seeks to stifle and discourage dissenting views, and when preachers and elders deem themselves to be beyond being questioned by honest inquiry we can only conclude that they are not free men and do not really want a free church. We have too many leaders in the church today who have no interest in dissenting views, and they want their decisions to be accepted without question.

John Stuart Mill speaks to the church of our day as well as his own. We are not a free people when we have leaders who rely more on pressure and force than on reason and moral suation. If it could be said of us as it was said of him we would be in a better position to bring about the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people:

"He held as high as any man the lamp of reason, and it burned the more brightly because he lived." — *the Editor*

WHAT IS YOUR IMAGE OF GOD?

Robert L. Johnson

Some of us who were students of R. C. Bell, at Abilene years ago, remember his facetious, yet somewhat serious quip, "Orthodoxy is my 'doxy' and heterodoxy is your 'doxy'." He was illustrating how common it is for all of us to assume that our particular interpretation of an issue must surely be the correct one. We might try to pride ourselves on being "open to the facts," but more than likely we are not wide open to them. We have all been conditioned by parents, friends, politicians, teachers, preachers, and editors to see things from certain perspectives or prejudices. We try to be objective in our studies but we are still limited by our frame of reference. This paper is no exception. Even in a discussion of the nature of Deity,

without constructive criticism, there is always the danger of fashioning God according to our own liking, if not to our own likeness.

Our interpretation of scripture has much to do with our mental image of God, and our mental image will in turn influence our interpretation of scripture. Any faith or religion will always be determined by the character of the God worshiped. And whenever we have a distorted image of God there is going to be some distortion of the faith that we present to the world. Whenever we stop quoting scripture and make our observations about it, any special emphasis we give to the passage may well reveal our own theology of God.

Graven images were prohibited early in the Mosaic era. But even before Moses, Abraham was already constructing mental images of God. In his dialogue with the Lord about Sodom, Abraham reasoned, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" Justice, fairness, and faith-keeping were part of his image of God. Moses reasoned with God and prevailed upon him to moderate his wrath. Yet he found himself one day expressing a very human longing when he said to God, "Show me your glory." Job agonized with his image of God. The writers of the Psalms often shared an exalted view of God. Solomon knew that the heavens could not contain God, much less the temple that he had built, but he prayed that the eyes of God might "be open night and day toward this house, the place of which thou hast said, 'My name shall be there'" (1 Kgs. 8:29).

Isaiah wrote, "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?" (Is. 40:25). Isaiah went on to stress the holiness of God, "Holy, Holy, Holy, . . . the whole earth is full of his glory" (Is. 6:3). God was likened to a king, a judge, a shepherd, a husband, a father. He was a majesty to be adored, a refuge, a rock, a fortress. In his frustration Jeremiah thought that God had deceived him (Jer. 15:18).

For many of the Jews God remained remote and transcendent. During the exile they wondered how they could worship him. They were far from him and believed that he was far from them. But some of the prophets were painting a different picture. Their God was concerned with injustice and social problems. He was not impressed with ceremony and ritual, nor with those who gave him only lip service. He wanted men to have a humble and contrite heart and a brotherly concern for one's neighbor. As Micah puts it, "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

The Lord through Jeremiah projects this image of himself, ". . . but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord" (Jer. 9:24).

The New Testament reveals that many of Jesus' contemporaries had images of God that were contrary to his own. Each of the Jewish sects believed themselves to be the orthodox interpreters of scripture. The Judaizers in the Galatian churches,

the factions at Corinth, and the Gnostic teachers were all persuaded they had the correct understanding of the scriptures and the teachings of Jesus. Long before the first century ended Paul was having to correct some of the distored images of God and of the Son of God that were creeping into the church. Through the centuries thousands of Christians lost their lives because they would not affirm the authorized image of God. Luther's and Calvin's image of God not only differed from that of the Roman church, but they differed from each other.

How have we acquired our image of God? There are voices that seem to say, "You should receive only what I clearly receive." Persecution is often the result when one group attempts to force "their" God upon others. Whether we admit it or not most of us by our own bias have arrived at our own "orthodox" image of God. And then we are disappointed when our image doesn't satisfy everyone else.

Over 300 years ago John Locke, in an essay entitled "Error," made a penetrating analysis of orthodox Christianity in his day. He wrote as follows:

> The great division among Christians is about opinions. Every sect has its set of them and that is called orthodoxy; and he that professes his assent to them, though with an implicit faith and without examining is orthodox and in the way to salvation; but, if he examines and thereupon questions any one of them, he is presently suspect of heresy, and if he oppose them or hold the contrary, he is presently condemned as in a damnable error, and in the sure way to perdition. Of this one may say, that there is nor can be nothing more wrong. For he that examines and upon a fair examination embrace an error for a truth, has done his duty more than he who embraces the profession of the truth. . . without having examined whether it be true or no.
>
> For if it be our duty to search after truth, he certainly that has searched after it, though he has not found it, in some points has paid a more acceptable obedience to the will of his Maker than he that has not searched at all, but professes to have found truth when he has neither searched nor found it; for he that takes up the opinions of any church in the lump, without examining them, has truly neither searched after nor found truth, but has only found those that he thinks have found truth, and so receives what they say with an implicit faith, and so pays them the homage that is due only to God.

Let's be grateful to those who are able to clarify obscure texts, but let's never equate someone's opinion with the verities of scripture. As Locke says, let's not pay them the homage that is due only to God. Distorted images are often created and perpetuated through a misplacement of trust. As someone has said, "Every man is a captive of some loyalty. He is only free to choose his bondage." — *2208 W. Granite, Siloam Springs, Ar. 72761*

OUR CHANGING WORLD

It is gracious of our readers to be concerned about my health problem as reported in this column last month. Your prayers and expressions of goodwill are deeply appreciated. I went to Baylor Medical College in Houston on Dec. 5 as planned, and further tests were taken which confirmed the diagnosis of prostate cancer. I was in fact examined by three urologists at the college, for I volunteered to be part of a nationwide study on research in early detection of prostate cancer and its subsequent treatment, which involved several hours of further tests. It was to my advantage to volunteer, as well as for what it might eventually do for others, for it gave my urologist a thorough picture of my own case. While my urological surgeon is only about 45, he has performed over 300 prostatectomies, and he exudes a quiet confidence. He explained to me my options, as my Denton doctors did, which are limited to radiation and surgery. If done right, radiation can be effective, he said, but when I asked him what he would do if he were in my place, he advised surgery as the only means of lasting cure. I told him with some enthusiasm, "Then let's do it and be done with it!" He complemented me for taking good care of myself, suggesting that my long years of running had paid off, for I was surgically ten years younger than my age. He said the prognosis was excellent, and he set Dec. 29 for the surgery, which gave me time to give autologous blood (a new term to me), but called after a few days and moved it back to Jan. 3. At this writing (Dec. 23) I have finished giving the blood through the American Red Cross, and the latest word is that Ouida, having arranged for the care of her mother, is going to Houston with me. We fly down on Jan. 2. She will probably return home after two or three days and I by Jan. 10, if all goes well and the Lord wills. So by the time you receive this issue it should all be over, except that they say it will be six weeks before I will be able to do anything much. Ouida is pleased that she can be with me, describing it as "the first medical crisis of our 45 years together." Not the first crisis, to be sure, but the first medical crisis. After 45 years! Now that is something big to be thankful for, but I am thankful for all this — early detection, good doctors and surgeons, superb medical facilities, the latest in medical research. How blessed our country is! But, unfortunately, that does not keep me from being a coward. I keep thinking that the world might come to an end before Jan 3! I remember Socrates' definition of courage, "Action in the face of known danger." We all need such courage for the living of these days, don't we? One of Ouida's favorite proverbs is also in order, "If you have frogs to swallow, swallow the big ones first." The Lord will provide! The courage, I mean, not the frogs!

John Wright in the bulletin of the Burke Road Church of Christ in Houston grants that recent developments in Eastern Europe are almost beyond our ability to believe, but he reports on one thing he knows for sure. The Eastern European Missions have distributed 50,000 Bibles in Moscow, and these were taken into the Soviet Union legally, which is a great change from all those years when they had to be smuggled in. The E.E.M. was invited to participate in the Moscow Book Fair where another 10,000 Bibles were distributed.

The Wycliffe Bible Translators in the Philippines have completed their work on the Ibanag New Testament and Psalms, which can be read by the Filippinos living in the northern provinces. Most of the 10,000 copies of the first printing have been distributed. Our friends, Dan and Suzanne New, whom I visited in 1988 in the Philippines, were involved in this ministry.

Harvard Divinity School now has a majority of 51% of its students who are women. Most all divinity schools have had in recent years a dramatic increase in women students, even though churches generally have not opened up all that much to the ministry of women. We could not have imagined such when I was a student at Harvard 40 years ago. I don't recall that we had a single woman enrolled.

The West Side Church of Christ in Hamilton, Illinois published this in one of their recent mailouts: "One hundred years ago at Sand Creek, Illinois, good brethren formally declared they would no longer regard other children of God (with whom they disagreed) as brethren. Sorrowfully, the widespread practice of this philosophy has resulted in disgraceful splintering and sectarianizing of the body of Christ. A lost world can never be won to Christ unless believers are one." They went on to say, "Let's adopt a new spirit!," and then gave this quote as one of their aims, "Making nothing a condition of fellowship which God has not made a condition of salvation."

I recently read with interest Wilson Wallace's tribute to his father Foy E. Wallce, Jr., longtime Church of Christ minister who died in 1979 at age 87, which was published in Torch of Truth. In reference to the controversy over divorce and remarriage, Wilson wrote of his father: "My father never believed that it was the work of preachers to divide established families. He was a man of the Bible, and he never tried to manipulate the word of God. He just believed that there were some situations that had to be left to God in the Judgment... He would not refuse to baptize those who had been involved in divorces, nor would he consent to breaking up families." I wish this could be said of many other of our preachers, some of whom are admirers of Foy E. Wallace, Jr.

The Christian Science church is in the throes of its most threatening crisis, not only because it has been declining in membership for decades but also because it is facing a frontal attack in the courts in reference to its most fundamental tenet, faith healing. In five states prosecutors are challenging the right of Christian Science parents to withhold medical treatment from their children. In two cases, one in Florida and the other in California, parents have been convicted in the deaths of their children. There is also dissension within the leadership over spending tens of millions in building a media empire, which some see as contrary to the founding principles of the church.

READER'S EXCHANGE

Thanks for being a prophet in the churches of the Restoration Movement — and for speaking out to us concerning our shortcomings. — *Delno Brown, Johnson City, Tn.*

You are always so optimistic about change in our people. The change I see is all too often at a glacier pace, but any change is better than stagnation. — *Midland, Tx.*

After 47 years in the Church of Christ I have left to identify with an independent, inter-denominational group where I am at last free to love and accept all the brethren in the Body of Christ. I have read your The Stone-Campbell Movement three times and look forward to having my own copy. Your journal is very refreshing. — *Buddy Hall, Colorado Springs, Co.*

(More of us are coming to realize that when people leave the Church of Christ they are not necessarily leaving Jesus Christ. But it grieves us that anyone would leave because they do not feel free to love and accept all Christians. More of our people are now loving and receiving other believers without having to leave. Nothing, not even the most sectarian environment, can keep us from doing that. It might sometimes be difficult, but maybe that is our calling, to show sectarians how to love and accept others. We need you, so don't leave! By the way, if this brother would read my history book three times, perhaps you should read it at least once. — *Ed.*)

We continue to find signs in our brotherhood that the Holy Spirit is working among us to change many attitudes toward reform. Prejudices are being dissolved and Jesus is being exalted as never before. It is through the influence of your journal and others of like mind and talents that we accredit this welcomed phenomena. — *Alfred C. Bradshaw, Nashville, Tn.*

I find myself scratching my head over some of your articles, but all in all I find them refreshing. They make me think of the statement of Jesus, "What saith the scriptures, How readest thou?" — *Jim Smith, Morro, Ca.*

Due to your health problem this story will interest you. An 85-year-old sheep rancher was admitted to the hospital for prostate surgery. He still worked, had a hardy constitution, recovered fully, and was released early. His doctor, a man in his early 30's, said to him when he was dismissed, "I will need to be seeing you over the next few months." The man hesitated briefly and then replied, "Who do I see when you're gone, Doc?" Maybe you ought to check out your backup doctor! — *Jerry Cook, Rifle, Co.*

May the grace of God permit you to be successfully treated. I would hope you could achieve your 40 year publication goal. You are certainly loved and respected by multitudes of those who love God and are in submission to the Lord Jesus. May we get to hear "good news." The world needs you awhile longer. — *Roland Steever, South Bend, In.*

Our prayers are with you during this time of illness. We selfishly want you to "keep on running" here on earth. You are an inspiration to us all. Your paper has helped us to grow and mature in the Lord. We pray you are training someone to take your place and carry on the work you have begun. Ouida, we will understand if the paper does not arrive. We think of Philemon 1:7 when we think of you two. — *Carol and Dora Bailey, Lee's Summit, Mo.*

BOOK NOTES

We have a few copies of William Barclay's delightful story of his own life, *A Spiritual Autobiography*, which I have read again and again, for it tells how he faced difficulties in such a way that it helps us do likewise. $2.50 postpaid.

Oscar Cullmann's *Baptism in the New Testament*, originally published in German by one of the great New Testament scholars, takes the position that the essence of Christian baptism is the reception of a member into the Body of Christ. While advocating adult baptism, he also allows for infant baptism. You will be interested in his argument. $4.50 postpaid.

Don DeWelt, founder of College Press and publisher of many of the books we list in this column, is one of the most unusual men of this generation. Since he is a great doer he has led an interesting life, one fraught with many crises. His life story, *Happy On The Way To Heaven*, makes for interesting and profitable reading. He says he wrote the book because he believes God has wrought a miracle in his life. It is well worth the price of $8.50 postpaid.

Speaking of College Press, Don DeWelt is still resolved to issue the writings of Carl Ketcherside. While he first attempted to generate enough interest by publishing the entire set, 34 books in 12 volumes, he now